SHANDA
FANTASY ARTS
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Mature
Readers

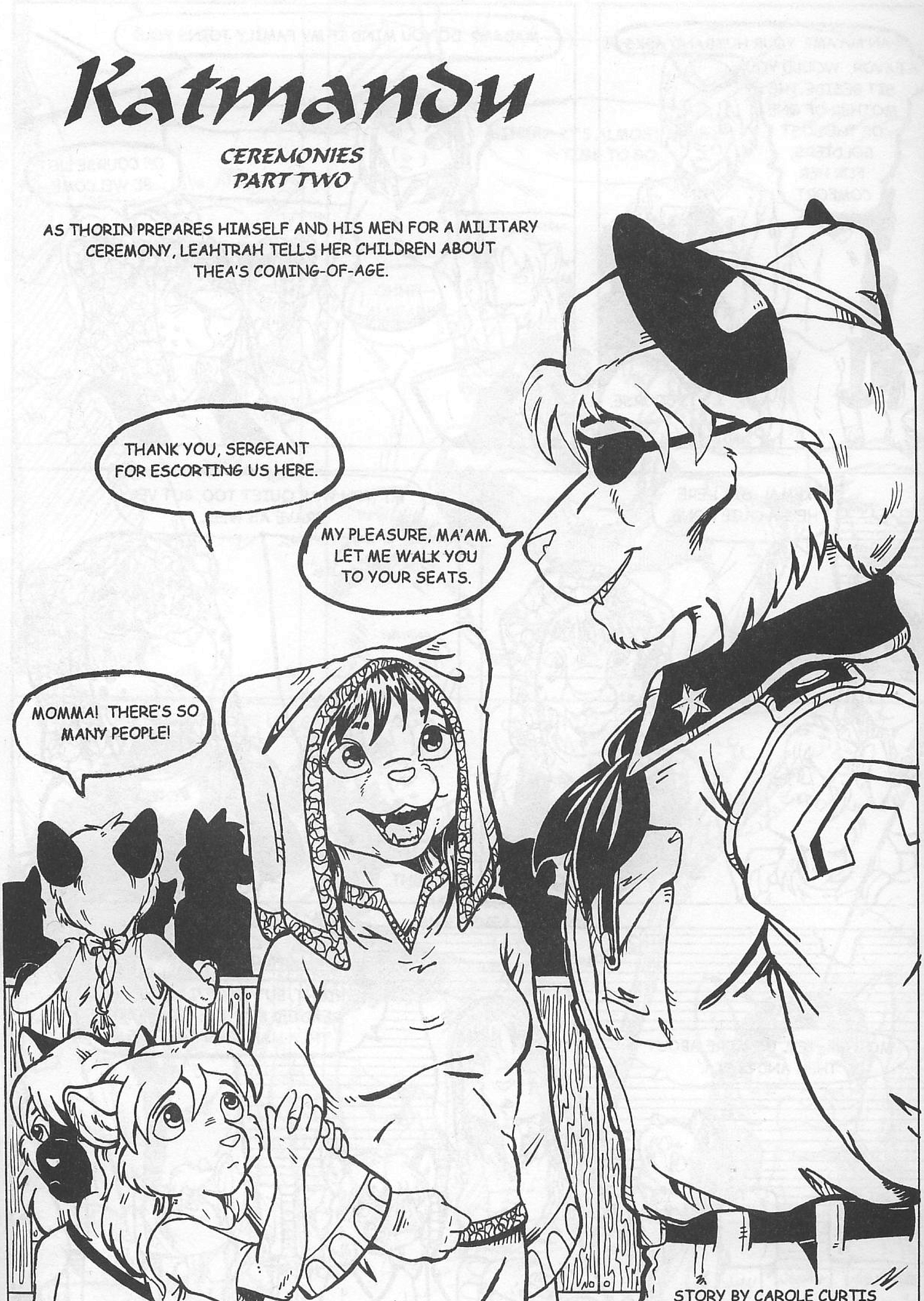
Carole Curtis

Katmandu

Katmandu

CEREMONIES
PART TWO

AS THORIN PREPARES HIMSELF AND HIS MEN FOR A MILITARY CEREMONY, LEAHTRAH TELLS HER CHILDREN ABOUT THEA'S COMING-OF-AGE.


THANK YOU, SERGEANT FOR ESCORTING US HERE.
MY PLEASURE, MA'AM. LET ME WALK YOU TO YOUR SEATS.
MOMMA! THERE'S SO MANY PEOPLE!

STORY BY CAROLE CURTIS
PENCILS BY SHAWNTAE HOWARD
INKING BY KEVIN MULDER
LETTERING BY MIKE AND CAROLE

-AN MA'AM? YOUR HUSBAND ASKS A FAVOR. WOULD YOU SIT BESIDE THE MOTHER OF ONE OF THE LOST SOLDIERS, FOR HER COMFORT.
OF COURSE.
MADAM? DO YOU MIND IF MY FAMILY JOINS YOU?
OF COURSE NOT. BE WELCOME.
KEMAL, SIT HERE. HE'S A QUIET ONE.
HELLO, SON.
MY SON WAS QUIET TOO, BUT VERY BRAVE AS WELL.
MOTHER, TELL US MORE ABOUT THEA AND LISKA.
ALL RIGHT, BUT *QUIETLY*. THE FAMILY READIED FOR THE CEREMONY. THEA HAD BEEN FASTING...

THEA? IT'S ALMOST DAWN. TIME TO GO.
OHHH— ALREADY?
QUIET. NO ONE MUST SEE US LEAVE.
WHY?
THEA THE GIRL LEFT THE TRIBE LAST NIGHT. THEY WILL MEET THEA THE WOMAN LATER.
OH? WHAT ABOUT UNCLE MARKREE THERE?
HE'S NOT LOOKING.

OOH! THE WATER'S COLD!
SHHH! DO YOU WANT SOMEONE TO COME?
ACTUALLY, YOU PROBABLY WOULDN'T MIND IF IT WAS GILES.
I THOUGHT MOTHER SHAYGIN WAS SUPPOSED TO DO THIS.
SHE DIDN'T GIVE BIRTH TO YOU. I DID.
MOTHER, AM I LIKE MY FATHER?
OH, THEA-
YOU STRIDE BOLDLY INTO EVERYTHING YOU SEE. NOTHING FRIGHTENS YOU. IN THIS AND SO MANY OTHER WAYS YOU ARE *JUST* LIKE YOUR FATHER.

HEY! WHERE'S *MY* CLOTHES?
BACK AT THE CAVE. THERE'S AN ORDER TO ALL THIS.
THIS IS SO DUMB.
HUSH. WHEN WE ENTER THE CAVE, KEEP QUIET.
KNEEL HERE, DARLING, AND WAIT.

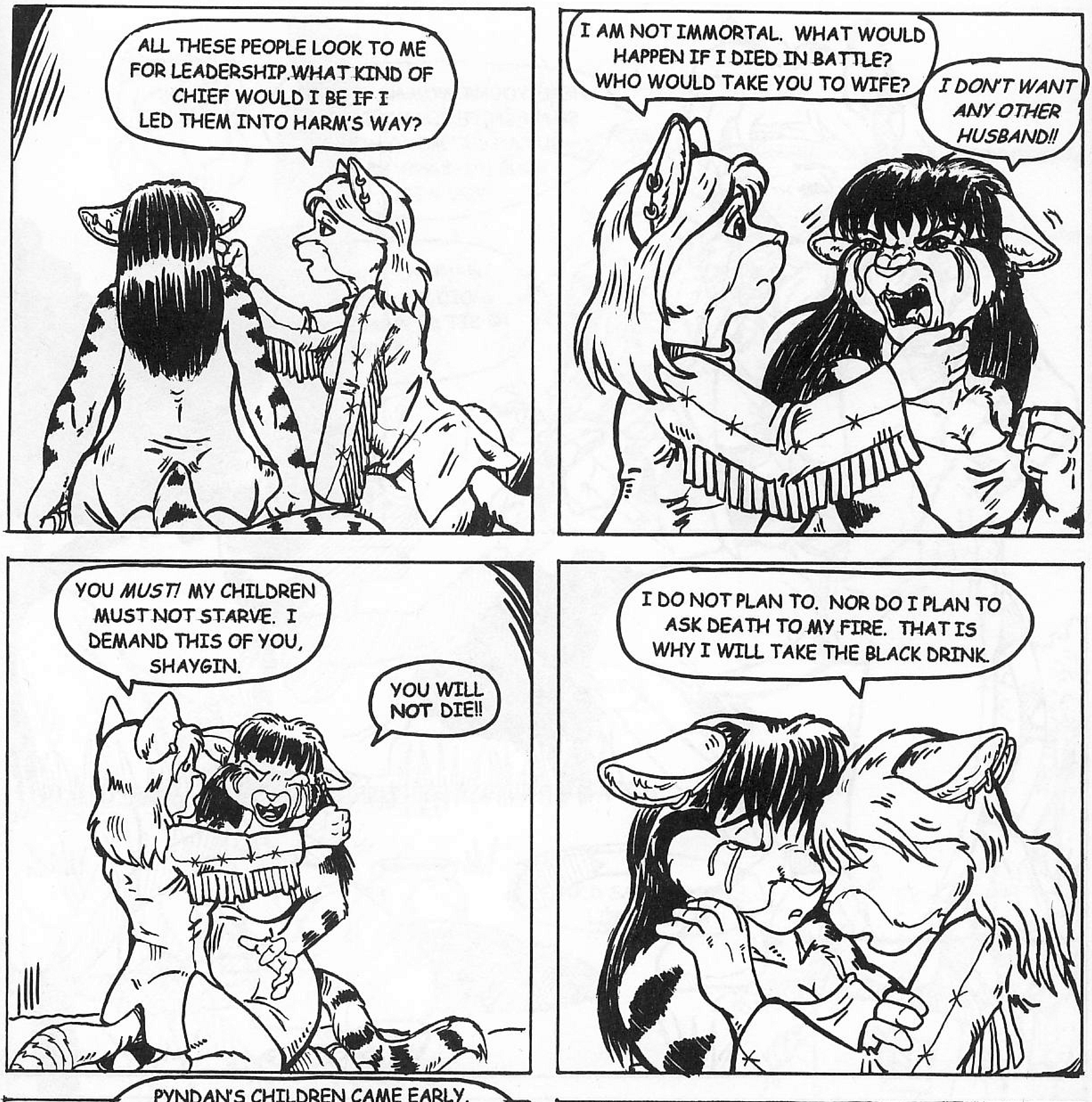
WOMEN OF MY CLAN, THIS IS MY DAUGHTER.
NAKED SHE CAME INTO OUR WORLD.
BY MY BLOOD SHE WAS GIVEN LIFE.
NOW SHE WISHES TO ENTER THE WORLD OF WOMEN.
NAKED SHE COMES. BY HER BLOOD SHE
TESTIFIES SHE IS READY.
WILL YOU ACCEPT HER?

WHAT IS THE FAMILY LINE OF THIS "GIRL?"
GODDESS HELP HER.
MY FATHER WAS RIAL HADA-RO-SEG, HIGHLAND WARRIOR. HE WAS THE SON OF VON WHO WAS THE DAUGHTER OF ATHOS. ATHOS' FATHER WAS GRANDIL OF THE CRECENT PEOPLE-
-WHO WAS SON TO BUKA, DAUGHTER TO TRENON-
SHE'S DOING IT. OUR DAUGHTER HAS LEARNED HER FAMILY LINE.
THIS IS MY FAMILY. I AM THEA MITSEL-EMAH OF THE PEOPLE OF THE GODDESS.
NOW IS THE GIRL CHILD GONE. HERE IS A *WOMAN!* WHO WILL CLOTHE HER?
I, SHAYGIN MITSEL-EMAH, WIFE OF LISKA, WILL CLOTHE MY DAUGHTER.

SHHH-THEY'RE COMING TO THE END.
THEY'RE SPREADING THE LINES OF POLLEN NOW. LET'S ENTER, WASIL.
GOOD MORN, SISTER. I BROUGHT YOU SOME BOWLS FOR COOKING.
THANK YOU PANKA. HOW ARE YOUR NEW KITTENS>
FINE. COME VISIT US.

SHE'S DONE SO WELL. BE HAPPY.
I AM HAPPY, FOR MY DAUGHTER.
ISN'T SHE PRETTY?
UM HUM.
THEA, SHAYGIN AND I HAVE TO GO CHANGE.
MOTHER, WHO'LL HELP ME CARRY ALL THIS BACK?
WE'LL SEND SOME *CHILDREN* TO CARRY FOR YOU.
OH! ALL RIGHT.
SHAYGIN, I NEVER MEANT FOR MY DECISION TO TROUBLE YOU.
IT'S THE WARRIOR TALKING, NOT MY HUSBAND.
IT *IS* YOUR HUSBAND'S VOICE.

I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THIS IN PUBLIC.
VERY WELL. WE'RE ALONE. LET'S TALK.
LISKA, I HAVE BEEN WITH YOU SIXTEEN TURNS OF THE SEASON! COULDN'T WE DISCUSS THIS MORE? WHY MUST YOU DO THIS?
SHAYGIN, OUR TENTS ARE FULL. YOU'VE GIVEN ME FOUR CHILDREN. I'VE BORN SIX. THAT'S MORE THAN MOST.
I DID NOT ASK TO BECOME A WARRIOR, BUT IF I HAD NOT, YOU WOULD NOT BE IN THIS TENT. I WON YOU AS A SLAVE, THEN FREED YOU AND TOOK YOU TO WIFE.
I DID NOT ASK TO BE A WAR CHIEF OR LEADER OF OUR CLAN. BUT I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LIVES OF SONNA, PYNDAN, MARKREE, ELISHAA, THEIR CHILDREN AND OUR CHILDREN.


ALL THESE PEOPLE LOOK TO ME FOR LEADERSHIP. WHAT KIND OF CHIEF WOULD I BE IF I LED THEM INTO HARM'S WAY?
I AM NOT IMMORTAL. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I DIED IN BATTLE? WHO WOULD TAKE YOU TO WIFE?
I DON'T WANT ANY OTHER HUSBAND!!
YOU *MUST!* MY CHILDREN MUST NOT STARVE. I DEMAND THIS OF YOU, SHAYGIN.
YOU WILL NOT DIE!!
I DO NOT PLAN TO. NOR DO I PLAN TO ASK DEATH TO MY FIRE. THAT IS WHY I WILL TAKE THE BLACK DRINK.
PYNDAN'S CHILDREN CAME EARLY. I COULD NOT HUNT FOR A MOON. I MUST RISK DEATH IN BATTLE. I WILL NOT RISK IT AGAIN GIVING LIFE.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND NOW, MY SWEET SHAYGIN?
YES. BUT I STILL DON'T LIKE IT.

HERE, YOUNG WOMAN. A GOOD SHARP KNIFE FOR YOUR TENT. YOU CAN CUT MEAT, HIDE OR YOUR HUSBAND; WHEN YOU WED.
THANK YOU, AUNT HESTA. DID YOU KNOW I GET TO SIT IN WOMEN'S COUNCIL NOW?
REALLY? WILL YOU LET THEM GET A WORD IN EDGEWISE?
OH, HESTA!
WHERE'S YOUR MOTHER? I NEED TO SPEAK WITH HER.
IN HER TENT, WITH MOTHER SHAYGIN.

PAP!
NICE THROW, PYNDAN!
I COULD SAY THE SAME, LISKATAM.
TONK!

BROKEN ARROW, I NEED YOUR CLAN LEADER.
CLAN LEADER? WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME, SISTER?
I WANT A PLACE TO BELONG. I WANT A HOME. I'LL STILL TRAVEL, BUT I WANT TO JOIN YOUR CLAN. WHAT IS REQUIRED OF ME?
WE HAVE FAMILIES TO FEED, YOUNG WARRIORS TO TRAIN. AND *I* SPEAK FOR US IN COUNCIL AND BATTLE.
AGREED AND DONE.
THAT'S IT? NO GREAT CEREMONY?
WELL, YOU STILL HAVE TO JOIN OUR TRIBE.
I WANT TO PITCH A TENT - WHERE I CAN KEEP MY FURS.
I'LL HAVE THE CHILDREN KEEP IT CLEAN FOR YOU, ALWAYS WAITING.
WHAT DO I PAY THEM?
YOU *HUNT* FOR THEM, FEED THEM, TEACH THEM.

COME ON, KITTENS. THEA NEEDS YOU.
GOOD MORN, PYNDAN.
GOOD MORN, LITTLE SISTER. I BROUGHT HELPERS TO CARRY FOR YOU.
YOU KNOW, PYNDAN, I WAS THINKING. DON'T YOU GET TIRED OF EATING ALONE SINCE PANKA WED?
I KNOW A SPECIAL WAY TO COOK A GAME HEN.
I DON'T USUALLY EAT ALONE, THEA.
OH?
CATCH ONE TOMORROW MORN AND I'LL COOK IT FOR YOU THAT NIGHT.
I'LL THINK ABOUT IT. -AND TALK TO LISKA.
SO WILL I- -TONIGHT.
HEY PYNDAN!!!

GET YOUR TAIL OVER HERE AND PULL!!!!
ISN'T THIS TENT TOO TALL?
HARDLY. IT'S FOR HESTA.
THAT'S RIGHT, BROKEN ARROW. I'VE JOINED YOUR CLAN. GUESS I CAN GET *YOU* TO SHOW ME AROUND.
SURE, HESTA.
I NEED TO FIND THE BEST AREAS TO HUNT AND CLEAN MY CLOTHES.
ANYTIME EXCEPT TOMORROW NIGHT.
OH?
I HAVE PLANS THEN.

OUR CLAN GROWS.
UH HUH. OUTWARD AND UPWARD.
HOW MANY DO YOU SPEAK FOR NOW?
I COUNTED TODAY. HESTA MAKES 23.
ARE YOU STILL SET ON YOUR COURSE?
I'VE PRAYED AND THOUGHT LONG ABOUT IT.
I WILL TAKE THE BLACK DRINK.
THEN I'LL SPEAK TO THE OTHER ELDERWOMEN. WE CAN DO THIS WITH THE FIRST DARK MOON. ONCE YOU TAKE THIS, THERE WILL BE NO MORE CHILDREN EVER.
I UNDERSTAND. I FACE DEATH DAILY AS A WARRIOR. I CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO FACE IT GIVING BIRTH.

TOO MANY DEPEND ON ME. I MUST DO THIS FOR OUR CLAN.
I RESPECT YOUR WISH. I WAS CONSIDERED YOUNG WHEN I TOOK IT. THERE WERE THOSE WHO SOUGHT MY HAND.
I BORE EIGHT CHILDREN. THREE STILL DRAW BREATH. AND I KNEW I COULD NEVER FIND ANOTHER LOVE WHO WOULD FILL MY HEART LIKE ATHOS.
I TOOKTHE BLACK DRINK AND DECIDED TO REMAIN A WIDOW.
HAVE YOU REGRETS?
YES, FLEETINGLY. DO YOU WISH MORE CHILDREN?
NO. I HAVE SIX OF MY BODY, ONE ADOPTED, AND FOUR THROUGH SHAYGIN.
THAT IS ENOUGH. THE GODDESS HAS BLESSED US. ALL ARE HEALTHY, BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL.

HUSBAND, I HAVE YOUR MIDDAY MEAL READY. PLEASE COME.
I'M NOT HUNGRY.
YOU *MUST* EAT.
YOU ARE MY LIFE AND MY LOVE, OUR CHIEF AND PROTECTOR. AND IT'S *MY* JOB TO KEEP YOU FED.
VERY WELL, MY LADY AND MISTRESS.

CONCLUDED NEXT ISSUE